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FM AMEMBASSY LUANDA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4957
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LUANDA 000616

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/08/2018

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL AQ

SUBJECT: "THE ANGOLAN" ELECTORAL NEWS BULLETIN, VOL. IV

REF: LUANDA 0585

Classified By: AMB DAN MOZENA FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) In This Issue:

- Media Space Tightens with Halt to Radio Call-In Shows
- MPLA and UNITA Shine, Others Stumble at Starting Gate
- The Trouble with Campaign Financing
- Extended School Closure During Electoral Period

Media Space Tightens with Halt to Radio Call-In Shows

¶2. (C) In what appears to be an attempt to manage public dialogue, National Radio has halted most live radio call-in shows in the lead-up to the September 5 legislative elections. Journalists privately told the Embassy that the few programs that will remain on-air will feature only scripted and screened calls. Embassy sources confirmed that in a recent closed-door meeting, Manuel Rabelais, the Minister of Social Communications, instructed journalists to suspend the shows for the duration of the electoral period. Rabelais has publicly denied these allegations, but the shows remain off the air. Catholic Church-run Radio Ecclesia has also chosen to suspend live call-in shows during the election period. Ecclesia sources told the Embassy that their decision has nothing to do with GRA pressure, but rather their concern that live call-in shows could be monopolized by small political parties that have limited media space in which to air their gripes. Radio LAC and Radio Despertar, which are respectively owned by MPLA and UNITA supporters, have continued to air live call-in shows.

MPLA and UNITA Shine, Others Stumble at Starting Gate

¶3. (SBU) Small opposition parties stumbled at the starting gate of the 30-day official campaign period, which kicked off August 5th. Electoral law gives each party five free minutes of daily airtime on national television and ten minutes on national radio, but UNITA and the MPLA were the only parties to use their airtime as a platform to present their campaign themes professionally and clearly. UNITA's President Isaias Samakuva took subtle yet effective swings at the ruling party in presenting UNITA's "Program of Change," noting that people shouldn't have to pay bribes for access to education and health care, and that businesses should not be owned only "by the elite, always the same elite." The MPLA's TV spot and campaign slogan, "MPLA: The Safe Route to a Better Angola," effectively sums up the ruling party's pitch that the team to lead the country should be the one with a proven track record in national reconciliation and reconstruction. The ruling party's spot utilized announcers and footage drawn from state media sources and a government-owned production studio to produce its state-of-the-art ad campaign.

¶4. (SBU) Most other parties merely showed how ill prepared they are for the campaign; only FNLAs and FPD showed some level of production value for at least part of their time slot. Others appeared to be recorded on camcorders and home-edited; Nova Democracia simply put up a powerpoint presentation and PDP-ANA presented nothing at all. Many parties burnt up their airtime playing music and showing the party's flag; FNLAs discussed the party's history through the 1960's and then spent two minutes showing silent footage of founder Holden Robert's funeral.

The Trouble with Campaign Financing

¶5. (SBU) Opposition parties claim their ability to campaign effectively has been hampered by a lack of campaign financing and have lambasted the GRA for its "late" distribution of the 1.2 million USD allotted by the state for each party running in the campaign. Parties argue the GRA has violated the electoral law, which calls for the distribution of campaign financing 60 days before the campaign starts. UNITA has threatened to pursue legal action against the GRA for this perceived violation of electoral law. For its part, the National Electoral Commission argues that another section of the law states that campaign financing will only be distributed to parties found eligible to contest the election; that list was finalized on July 28th (reftel), prior to the legal deadline of 30 days before the campaign. Both opposition parties and the CNE appear to have been caught by yet another inconsistency within the electoral law.

¶6. (SBU) The lack of financing has certainly hurt opposition

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parties. PLD President Analia Pereira said opposition parties have to use private multimedia houses to produce their TV and radio spots; costs run at ten to thirteen thousand USD to produce a five-minute spot on television, and three to six thousand USD per ten-minute radio spot on radio. Angola also has only limited printing capacity for brochures, pamphlets, and other written campaign material; the financing delay has also severely restricted the ability of small parties to mass-produce information about their plans and platforms.

Extended School Closure During Electoral Period

¶7. (U) The Ministry of Education ordered an extended closure of all primary and secondary schools in Angola for forty-five days, from July 28 through to September 10, 2008. Dr. Soma, Director for Educational Programs in the Ministry, defended the closure as a means for teachers and adult students to participate fully in the electoral process and serve as electoral and polling station agents. In addition, in many rural areas schools are the only concrete building; many will be used as voting stations and warehouses for voting materials in the pre-electoral period.

¶8. (U) COMMENT: Parents have sharply criticized the extended closure, noting that the normally-scheduled 10-day break in early September should more than suffice. They also question how this will affect students' academic progress, especially if the same extended closure is implemented for the Presidential elections currently scheduled for 2009. Dr. Soma assured parents that the closure will not affect students' progress in the academic year, but at the same time promised that the school year will end on time. No plan has yet been presented on how students will recoup the lost time; most schools rotate different levels through in the morning and afternoon and have no electricity, so simply extending the school day is not viewed as an option.

MOZENA